DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 077 904 SP 006 603

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TITLE Teacher Training: A Personal Approach.
NOTE 8p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Group Unity; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Peer Relationship; Peer Teaching; Personal Adjustment; Personal Growth; *Personal Relationship; *Student Teacher Relationship; *Student Teaching; Teacher Education

ABSTRACT

Indiana State University has developed an experimental program to develop a personal approach to teacher training. The ultimate intention of the program is to produce educators who are personally committed to the development of the young people often collectively labeled "students." Devices used in the program include the use of student names, student photos to facilitate prompt correlation of names and faces, personal tutorials, and, above all, the use of the student in class operations such as lectures, discussions, peer teaching, and course evaluation. (JA)

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TEACHER TRAINING: A PERSONAL APPROACH

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Recent writings indicate that contemporary educators feel that the teaching in our schools is lacking a personal quality which it badly needs. Charles Silberman has said that the place where the quality is missing is not only in the classroom but also (and more importantly) in the students.[1] He attributes this largely to the mass media which have actually changed all members of our society. This idea parallels the "Four-Walls" concept used by Robert Havighurst to express his opinion that the school and urban people have become separated.[2] After presenting a model of the instructional process, another contemporary author follows with a warning word that teaching is not a highly rational process in which the teacher follows the logic of the instructional process and obtains predictable results.[3] Recognizing the importance of personal teacher-student relationships even at the secondary level, Theodore Hipple, in his text, Secondary School Teaching, devotes a section to "knowing the students."[4]

Once having agreed that a need exists for a much more personal approach to teaching, one might ask how teachers can be trained to use such an approach. An experimental program at Indiana State University has been developed to find ways of achieving this goal and hopefully produce teachers who are more than instructional leaders, educators who are personally committed to the development of the young people whom we collectively and impersonally label "students."

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(The degree of conviction among the participants of this program is evidenced by some teachers and doctoral fellows who give their time to teach an additional section and develop evaluative instruments to measure program progress, and by all of the other participating professors who give class time for the administering of such tools.)

One basic assumption which undergirds every thrust of the Indiana State University program is that experience is essential for behavioral change. A second assumption is that consistency must exist between the professor and that which he "professes." Together these assumptions mean that if we want our prospective teachers to teach in a personal manner we must, ourselves, demonstrate such approaches and allow students opportunities to experience using them.

The Professor in a Personal Role

But the university professor is not expected to develop personal relationships with students, an unwritten code. What effect does knowledge of this attitude have on the program? Perhaps before this question is answered we should assure that we have a mutual conception of what we mean by a personal role. In what kind of personal activities do the professors engage?

Personal Introductions

During the first few weeks of class special emphasis is placed on developing familiarity among class members. The development of desirable social relationships requires class time. Although some sections of the secondary methods courses are structured to the degree that a tentative calendar covering the entire term is provided on the first day of classes, even in these sections time is allotted for the development of good working relations. Beyond planning and structuring these sessions, what is the professor's role?

From the beginning the professor stresses the importance of using individual names in teaching. Some advantages are the contributions which individual name using makes to building students' self-concepts, developing positive relationships between teacher and students, enhancing communications (more responses to teacher questions, when directed to individuals by name), and a step from teaching a subject to a class toward helping individuals become inquisitive and helping them explore their curiosities. In other words, the personal approach facilitates an attempt to help the student become self-motivating and self-educated. How does it work?

Because it seems impossible to limit the enrollment in general methods classes to an ideal number, each activity must work in sections containing as many as thirty students. At the very first class meeting the professor presents each student with a 7 x 9 name card (first names seem to work best) for display on his desk or table. A group photo is taken and individual photos are cut out and placed on a seating chart. When duplicated, each student receives a copy of the chart. The professor's copy becomes a record on which each grade is entered throughout the semester and a permanent file to be used for recommendations in future years. Time is provided during the first two class meetings for each member (including the professor) to talk to the class about himself, his reasons for teaching, etc.

Personal Tutorials

Since most sections of secondary education methods classes at I.S.U. utilize peer teaching, a specific need is felt for tutorials. Some professors hold a tutorial with each student just prior to his peer teaching, going over his planned lesson to offer suggestions, and a separate individual tutorial just following the peer lesson, discussing methods of improving the skills used in the lesson.

In addition to the peer teaching tutorial, a different type of individual tutorial is held by some professors. This tutorial is a pot-pourri affair in which the professor attempts to make the student feel an important asset to the class, remove factors which may be bothering the student, and assist the student in continuous self evaluation. Possibilities are explored whereby he can contribute more to the course and the course can become more meaningful to him.

In addition to these structured attempts by the professor to personalize the course, his individual reactions to students are equally important. Each day he casually appears in the room or in the hallway outside a few minutes before the class hour to talk with early arrivals. During the lessons he directs comments to other individual students. His office is made available daily to students; yet it is understood that each visit should have a purpose.

The Student in a Personal Role

Up until this point attention has been focused on showing how the professor's role can be made more personal. How about the student? How can his role be personalized and what effect does it have? And to finally respond to an earlier question, since most university courses are not very personal, how does this stereotype affect the student in a personalized class?

At the beginning of the term the general reaction to this approach is very neutral. Because the approach is unfamiliar, the student often needs time to pause, think, and adjust.

One of the basic operational rules of the class is that each comment must be directed to a person by name. Although, at first, this is a bit awkward for the student, he can readily see that it is more difficult for the professor (since he may have three or four sections of names to learn each term).

The class activities throughout the term fall into three basic categories: lectures, discussions, and peer teachings.

Lectures

Each session includes a student task which provides time for discussion. Individuals are questioned about their performance and results on the task, thus providing more direct contact with students. Most of the lecture topics are predetermined by a team of professors (including one methods expert, one media expert, and one secondary education doctoral fellow). Recognizing, however, that personal approach must reflect the needs of individuals, several dates are left open and the lecture topics for these days are determined throughout the semester to satisfy the student needs.

Discussions

A list of weekly reading assignments throughout the term is provided during the first meeting. Students are paired and one class meeting each week is reserved for discussion of the readings. Each pair of students leads one of the discussions. This dual responsibility necessitates close cooperation among students, for a tutorial is held with the pair of students and several specific points are identified to be explored during the discussion. For example, each discussion team is responsible for involving every student in the discussion, helping the fellow class members identify the position of the author on certain issues, and soliciting the personal opinions of their colleagues on each issue. At the end of each discussion, a critique of the discussion is held to explore successful approaches and to make suggestions for the leading of discussions during the following weeks. Because they provide an outlet whereby the student can express his personal feelings, the discussions contribute much to the personal approach.

Peer Teaching

Each student is provided one class hour for teaching a lesson to his peers. Each lesson ends ten minutes prior to the bell. Roughly half of these ten minutes are spent in groups discussing the lesson which they have just witnessed. The remaining time is spent having a member of each group report the decisions of that group.

Students are expected to be very objective in their critiques, to identify the lesson assets, and to make suggestions for improving the lesson. Each comment is directed to the peer teacher. Not all comments can be focused on the good parts of the lesson or on the effective skills used by the teacher; at least three suggestions for improving the lesson must come from each group. To get these types of expressions from students requires a special classroom climate. Because of their close relationships with their fellow students, these students view the critiques as avenues whereby they can help and receive help from their fellow students. This most essential attitude can exist only in a class where each member knows every other member.

Course Evaluation

The secondary methods classes at I.S.U. are very much designed by the students. This is important to them. At the end of each semester the students suggest changes for the following semester. This has resulted in changing textbooks once a year, deleting certain lectures, readings, and films, and adding replacements.

A participating doctoral fellow majoring in evaluation design and implementation has developed pre and post instruments to measure changes in attitude toward teaching and toward the methods course. Since there are five teams each conducting two sections of the general methods course, a comparison can be made in the changes in attitude of students among teams. Each professor has a report of the results

for his students and a report of the combined ten sections.

Conclusion

Since the program is seen as an experimental one, no teacher is shocked or discouraged when his efforts prove worthless. The program is an on-going one. Revisions are made weekly or daily. Mistakes often provide means for improvement. Each team can contribute to the other four, but cannot impose its methods on others.

Students rate the personal quality and the peer teaching experience as the two most valuable aspects of the course. Knowing that their experiences have been selected by former students is significant to them. Of some two hundred anonomous responses to a class evaluation questionnaire over ninety-five percent of the students who have taken the course have rated it worthwhile enough that they would recommend it to following students.

The professors and doctoral fellows feel that they learn from each other and from the students. This opportunity makes the constant evaluation and revising worthwhile.

NOTES

[1]Charles E. Silberman, Crisis in the Classroom (New York: Vintage Books, 1971) p. 11.

[2]Rudie Tretten, Education and the Many Faces of the Disadvantaged (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1972) p. 59.

[3]Thomas E. Clayton, Teaching and Learning (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975) p. 20.

[4]Theordore W. Hipple, Secondary School Teaching (Pacidic Palisades, California: Goodyear Publishing Company, Inc., 1970) p. 22-26.